

# MAINE MARITIME ACADEMY

A College of Engineering, Management, Science, and Transportation

## Joint-Standing Committee on Education & Cultural Affairs

### Testimony in Support of LD 736, "An Act to Improve Ferry Service Reliability by Providing Scholarships at the Maine Maritime Academy"

**Monday, March 17, 2025**

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and distinguished members of the Joint-Standing Committee on Education & Cultural Affairs, my name is Chace Jackson and I serve as Maine Maritime Academy's Legislative Affairs Coordinator. I am proud to be here today in support of Rep. Ray's proposed bill, LD 736, "An Act to Improve Ferry Service Reliability by Providing Scholarships at the Maine Maritime Academy".

Established in 1941 and based in Castine, MMA is Maine's special-purpose college and in fact one of only six State Maritime Academies founded to play a vital role in our nation's maritime interests and national security. We bridge this state's proud seafaring tradition with its storied role in American maritime history, training Maine students who become the finest mariners operating vessels all around the globe. In addition, we offer degrees in the fields of engineering, marine transportation, marine biology and oceanography, and international business and logistics. Our graduates are commonly recognized by industry employers as the best among all maritime academies. Many of our students are members of our Regiment of Midshipmen which is a rigorous course of military-style training, discipline and leadership. MMA prides itself as "Maine's Leadership College".

As you may know, private and public ferry services are vital components of Maine's transportation infrastructure, providing safe and reliable transportation for passengers and goods to Maine's islands and coastal communities. Ferry operators serve communities central to Maine's sense of identity - many of these places characterize our sense of this state. However, in recent years, the Maine State Ferry Service and other private operators have met the same challenges faced by all state agencies and employers currently providing critical pieces of our state's infrastructure, which is that of workforce recruitment.

LD 736 aims to address this issue and bolster Maine's complement of trained and available ferry operators by creating the Workforce Development Scholarship Program at MMA. This program will make available scholarships to a minimum of 115 applicants who may or may not be full-time MMA students to assist them in earning the initial credits necessary to gain

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employment with a ferry service operator. These scholarships will be available to Maine residents who meet the necessary state criteria for the operation of watercraft for commercial purposes. By providing this financial assistance, the Workforce Development Scholarship Program will help to ensure that Maine's ferry service operators have a reliable and well-trained workforce. In turn, this will benefit the communities that rely on ferry services for their transportation needs.

MMA's participation in the proposed training program is one component of our long-term plan to lead in the "marinization" of those industries, trades, and services that will define the "blue economy" of the future. New industries and trades are joining traditional Maine staples like lobstering and fishing in requiring a skilled workforce increasingly familiar with complex, digitized vessels and equipment. MMA believes we can play a major role in helping Mainers who envision a career in one of these industries have the modern competencies to move throughout them over the course of their lives.

This bill is a follow-up to last sessions' LD 1139, brought forward at that time by Sen. Chip Curry. It incorporates a committee amendment that recognized the original draft should be broadened to include private ferry service operators, in addition to the Maine State Ferry Service. However, LD 1139 also included a \$35,000 appropriation for marketing of the new scholarship program that would help ensure applicants made their way to the program, housed at MMA's Center for Professional Mariner Development in Bucksport. As such, we would recommend the committee include those funds in this piece of legislation to advance the same programmatic goals discussed in 2023-24.

In conclusion, I urge you to support LD 736 and the creation of the Workforce Development Scholarship Program at Maine Maritime Academy. This program will help ensure Maine's community of ferry operators have a reliable and well-trained workforce for years to come, while bridging Mainers with the maritime industry and its exciting future. I would be glad to answer any questions from the Committee. Thank you for your time and consideration.